

Stress at Work Toolkit

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1. Introduction

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines work related stress as:

'The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them'. Employees feel **stressed** when they can't cope with pressures and other issues placed upon them.

Workplace Stress can be caused by an organisational issue rather than any fault/failing of an individual and develops because a person is unable to cope with the excessive demands/pressures being placed upon them. It is not in itself an illness, but physical or mental health issues may subsequently develop if excessive stress is not addressed.

It is recognised a certain level of stress is part of all our work life and it helps to motivate people and will boost their energy and performance levels. But when the demands from the working environment exceed a person's ability to cope or control, it becomes a negative rather than a positive force. People can feel stressed when there are too few demands on them, when they are bored, under-valued, by-passed, or under-stimulated. Stress is not a medical condition, but research shows that prolonged exposure to stress is linked to poor mental health, such as anxiety and depression.

Ultimately any part of the human body can be affected by exposure to long term stress or as a result of a sudden traumatic event which causes harm or damage. Stress related ill health can present itself in many ways including physical and psychological health problems, or changes in social interaction or ability at work.

The NICE guidance and Toolkit "Creating Healthy NHS Workplaces" centres on interventions to promote mental wellbeing through healthy working conditions. The recommendations for NHS organisations include:

- promoting a culture of participation, equality and fairness that is based on open communication and inclusion
- using frameworks such as Health and Safety Executive (HSE) management standards for work-related stress to promote and protect employee mental wellbeing
- considering flexible working arrangements

The Trust has developed its Health & Wellbeing Offer for colleagues which is available through the Health & Wellbeing Pinwheel on the front page of the Intranet. This includes support available for Psychological wellbeing.

The Trust will use information from the annual Staff Opinion Survey, the monitoring of sickness absence records, and Occupational Health/counselling referrals, as well as Managers risk assessments to actively identify work place stressors and develop action plans to reduce the risks and prevent harm. This will form part of a Workplace Stress Dashboard which will be presented to the Trust's Health and Safety Committee, JNCC and People and Culture Committee.

Coronavirus Pandemic

The Coronavirus pandemic has for the majority of people increased their awareness of stressors relating to themselves, their families, friends, colleagues and patients. This is on top of the often multiple stressors managed on a daily basis.

The Stress Risk Assessment referred to in the Stress at Work Policy (and shown in Appendix B of this Toolkit) is separate and additional to the individual Occupational Health Covid Risk Assessment. The latter looks mainly at the impact of the environment on the physical health of each individual.

2. Scope

It is a requirement of the Trust to identify and eliminate (as far as reasonably practicable) the possibility or likelihood of events which may, over a period of time, or as a one off, cause employees' mental health to be affected. If the risk cannot be eliminated then it must be either reduced, or sufficiently controlled and monitored. The Trust's approach is to raise awareness of the potential causes and signs of stress and to support individuals and managers in identifying where particular support may help someone to avoid harmful effects on their physical and mental wellbeing. The aim of this toolkit is to provide sufficient information to Managers to allow them to confidently assess and review colleagues who may be demonstrating signs of stress.

3. Responsibility and Duties

The Trust Board has a legal responsibility for all Trust policies and supporting documents and for ensuring they are suitable and sufficient for achieving their needs.

The Trust has a duty of care under Health and Safety at work Act to:

- Identify all workplace stressors and conduct risk assessments to eliminate stress or control the risks from stress, risk assessments will be regularly reviewed.
- Consult with Trade Union Safety Representatives on all proposed actions relating to the prevention of workplace stress.
- Provide appropriate training for all managers and supervisory staff in stress management.
- Provide confidential counselling for colleagues affected by stress caused by either work or external factors.

3.1 Director of People and Culture has overall responsibility for the publication and distribution of the Stress at Work policy and all associated documents.

3.2 Managers

People management requires a particular set of skills, one element of which is the ability to demonstrate insight and understanding of the impact of stress upon individuals. Managers should endeavour to preserve and promote positive mental health and reduce stress.

Supportive management behaviour plays one of the most important roles in reducing stress as colleagues look to managers for approval, appreciation and information. This is particularly important during times of organisational change.

Managers/supervisors should:

- Complete annual Workplace Risk Assessments ensuring workplace stress is reviewed appropriately (see Section 5.0). Provide a copy of completed assessment to Health and Safety Dept.
- Carry out individual Stress Risk Assessments (when required) on affected colleagues and identify actions to remove or reduce these risks.
- Ensure effective and open communication with colleagues, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes.
- Promptly investigate any reported incidents of stress and carry out an individual Stress Risk Assessment.
- All Managers are encouraged to self-assess themselves at least annually using the HSE Stress Management Competency Indicator Tool
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/mcit.pdf>

- Participate in any training to understand the negative impacts of stress and how to manage stress related issues.
- Ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated.
- Monitor the impact that stress is having upon themselves and upon colleagues, e.g. by talking to colleagues and monitoring sickness absence data.
- Monitoring Workload, working time and overtime to ensure that colleagues are not overloaded.
- Monitoring holidays to ensure colleagues are taking their entitlement
- Demonstrate skill in diagnosing where there is the potential for workplace stress to have a harmful effect on colleagues.
- Be vigilant and offer additional support to a colleague who is experiencing stress outside work e.g. bereavement.
- Assess the potential for making changes to working patterns/methods to help alleviate the harmful effects of stress.
- Co-operate with Trust-wide initiatives to audit and monitor potential stressors to assist in the identification of vulnerable staff groups and encourage colleagues to participate in local and national staff surveys.

3.3 Health and Safety Team

- Train and support managers in implementing risk assessments (including Stress Risk Assessments)
- Inform the Trust Board and the Health and Safety Committee of any changes and development in the field of stress at work.
- Report at the quarterly Health and Safety Committee meetings any stress related concerns raised within the departmental annual Workplace Risk Assessments.
- Perform a pivotal role in ensuring that this toolkit is effective and sufficiently implemented.

3.4 Health and Safety Committee

- The Health and Safety Committee will oversee monitoring of the Stress at Work Policy.
- Health and Safety Committee chair will report to JNCC and TME on any significant risks or findings raised within the Committee in relation to Stress at Work.

3.5 Human Resources

The HR Advisory Team will assist, as an internal resource in the Trust, by advising managers and supporting colleagues who feel that they are experiencing difficulties as a result of work pressures.

This may include:

- Facilitating access to detailed information about causes and levels of sickness absence, turnover and staff engagement (from staff surveys) to help managers to closely reported issues.
- Liaising with Occupational Health and other external agencies to help provide confidential support.

3.6 Occupational Health

The Occupational Health Department will be responsible for:

- Providing specialist advice and where appropriate supporting stress awareness training.

- Supporting Human Resources, Health and Safety and Training and Development Department in the training of managers regarding stress management and risk assessment.
- Assessing employees who self-refer or are referred by their line managers due to concerns about their wellbeing, or stress-related sickness absence;
- Providing such employees with support and confidential counselling. Colleagues can access this service 24/7.
- Where a management referral has been made a response would be provided to the manager within 3 days of the appointment.

3.7 Trade Union Representatives

- Advising and supporting colleagues regarding the application of policies including Stress at Work.
- Monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of the Stress at Work policy in partnership with HR and managers to ensure that processes are applied fairly and transparently
- Working in partnership with managers to support improvements in colleague health, safety and wellbeing
- Demonstrate a positive approach to tackling stress in the workplace.

4. Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Stress Management Standards

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 dictates that every employer has a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of their workforce.

Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999) employers have a duty to assess the health and safety risks associated to colleagues, this will include the assessment of workplace stress.

The HSE stress Management Standards have been developed to encourage organisations to assess workplace stress pro-actively (Refer to Appendix A for more information).

The Trust as far as reasonable practicable will adhere to these standards and in so doing minimise stress within the workplace.

The HSE management standards focus on the following six key areas:

1. **Demands:** such as workload, work patterns and the work environment
2. **Control:** such as how much say the person has in the way they do their work
3. **Support:** such as the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues
4. **Relationships:** such as promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour
5. **Role:** such as whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles
6. **Change:** such as how organisational change is managed and communicated in the organisation.

Managers are expected to display supportive management behaviour and to foster healthy working relationships between colleagues.

- **Supportive Management Behaviour**
This includes providing feedback and communicating openly on actions/decisions taken, utilising the knowledge skills and experience of colleagues, considering how to protect colleagues from competing demands, carrying out high quality appraisals, providing development opportunities, leading by example and being aware of employee health and wellbeing.
- **Positive working relationships**
This includes ensuring that managers are aware of the true value of effective team work and the impact organisational change can have on performance, team development, applying policies fairly and consistently, communicating effectively and personally rather than relying on email, and being aware of the impact of their own behaviour on others.
- **Positive contribution**
It is recognised that having information and feedback is central for a feeling of wellbeing at work. This includes ensuring appraisals are carried out and ensuring a balance between praise and constructive criticism/feedback. Good managers will share positive feedback and customer/client satisfaction with colleagues. They will also ensure that any challenge is put across in a constructive way – a culture of “courteous challenge”.
- **Participation/being kept informed**
Colleagues should have regular updates on key issues and regular feedback. This can be through regular team meetings where views can be shared and questions asked and responded to, sharing feedback from staff surveys so that colleagues can see how this has benefited them, ensuring that colleagues hear about things first rather than from other sources within or outside the organisation.

4.1 Workplace features that have a negative impact on Health and Wellbeing

It is everyone’s responsibility to escalate concerns regarding the following:

- **Work Overload**
Stress is more likely to occur when there is a loss of control in managing demand which is usually through workload pressure. Managers need to understand their team’s workload, and the strengths of their team and individuals within their roles, so that they can effectively allocate tasks. They need to support colleagues in prioritising their tasks, and develop a culture where they feel confident in raising concerns about workload. They should encourage supportive team work and review and reduce unnecessary paperwork and administration. It should also be recognised that frequently asking individuals to work in unfamiliar situations may impact upon their health and wellbeing.
- **Poor Equipment, Facilities and Resources**
Not having the right tools/facilities/resources for the job is something which heightens stress, particularly where people are busy. Managers need to ensure that colleagues have the right equipment and that it is maintained properly. Where faults occur they need to communicate this to the team with an update of when they will be repaired and what should happen in the meantime.

- **Difficult Work-Life Balance**

Where work may be impacting on an individual's home life e.g. prevents someone leaving on time to care for a dependent, this can impact on levels of stress. Managers should not insist on challenging timescales where these do not need to exist and should monitor colleague working hours and forward plan appropriately. They should empower colleagues to feel confident about raising questions and concerns around unreasonable deadlines.

- **Violence and Aggression (physical and non-physical)**

Colleagues are likely to have less resilience if they are subjected to behaviour at work which they feel undermines their sense of value and self-worth. The Trust will have a zero tolerance approach to violence towards colleagues and will communicate successful prosecutions to allow colleagues to feel that they have more control over the work environment. Managers should ensure that colleagues are aware of the Management of Violence and Aggression Policy, and the Dignity at Work Policy, provide resilience and conflict resolution training where necessary, and pursue prosecutions and educate the public so that colleagues feel protected.

Immediate support should be offered to all colleagues following a stressful event, and managers and colleagues should be fully aware of what action to take if the colleagues member is experiencing difficulties. Details regarding this support are available on the Intranet under "Supporting Colleagues Through Traumatic Incidents/Stressful Incidents, Complaints and Claims".

4.2 Recognising Stress

Stress can present itself in many different ways including physical symptoms, changes in normal behaviour and emotional symptoms. These can develop into health conditions including depression and anxiety, heart disease and irritable bowel syndrome.

The following characteristics, especially in combination, could indicate that an individual may be showing signs of stress.

- High levels of sickness absence (deteriorating attendance and regular bouts of recurring illness)
- Increased accidents/incidents
- Increased disputes/grievances/conflicts with colleagues
- Noticeable reduction in performance levels
- Poor decision making/increased errors
- Erratic timekeeping
- Loss of motivation and commitment.
- Incidents of violence at work

The following are just some of the effects stress might have on individuals:

- **Emotional effects:** anxiety, anger, frustration, moodiness, irritability, loss of pleasure and interest, despair, depression and impaired sleep, negative thoughts, increased anxiety, increase alertness, unnecessary guilt, panic, mood swings
- **Physical effects:** tenseness and musculoskeletal problems, headaches, tiredness, appetite disturbance (under / over eating), light headaches, weakened immune system (leading to frequent infections), raised blood pressure, palpitations, chest pain, stomach cramps, nausea

- **Psychological effects:** impairment of perception, concentration, memory, judgement, decisiveness, accuracy, motivation and creativity (thinking, feeling, doing), depression and generalised anxiety disorders.
- **Social effects:** relationships may be more difficult, withdrawing/not wanting to socialise, increased alcohol, nicotine or drug intake, under or overeating, becoming accident prone, working longer hours, not taking breaks, no longer having time for leisure activities
- **Behavioural effects:** being short tempered, aggressive or compulsive, crying.

4.3 Advice to give to individuals on how to cope with stress

The following techniques can help individuals to 'self-manage' stress:

- **Manage your time:** Prioritise, set reasonable deadlines, delegate when possible
- **Pace yourself:** Take regular breaks away from your work area
- **Face up to things:** Create an action plan for difficult situations, take it step by step, and learn from it.
- **Practice being assertive:** Avoid over-commitment, don't become a people pleaser.
- **Communicate:** Ask for help, use all the available resources you need.
- **Develop and maintain social support:** Keep in contact with your network of friends both in and out of work. The more isolated you are the more stressed you are likely to be.
- **Establish a sensible work/life balance:** Maintain boundaries between work and home, avoid regularly working late or taking work home. Where you are homeworking this may present a greater challenge. Use your holiday entitlement in a planned way.
- **Maintain physical health:** Learn to relax, reduce smoking, eat and drink sensibly, reduce caffeine and alcohol
- The link below will provide managers with sufficient information and confidence to pro-actively manage stress at work within their areas of control

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/assets/docs/stress-talking-toolkit.pdf>

5.0 Stress Risk Assessment

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 requires all employers to assess the nature and scale of risk to health and safety in the workplace in order to remove or if not reasonably practical reduce the impact of all potential hazards. This assessment will cover psychological hazards, the mental stresses of each job role as well as physical risks to health.

- Managers will identify potential stressors as part of their annual departmental risk assessments (Refer to Trust Risk Assessment Policy).
- Managers should promptly investigate any reported incidents of stress and carry out an individual **Stress Risk Assessment** with a view to putting in place control measures (**Appendices B & C**).
- All employees may experience periods of pressure at work and short periods of pressure are not necessarily of concern (but should be noted). It is the risk from sustained and/ or excessive pressure, without the opportunity to recover, that needs to be assessed and measures put in place to control the risk of adverse effects.
- Issues that cannot be resolved at a local level or that are deemed as a wider WAHT issue, should be addressed through consultation with the HR, Health and Safety Team, Union Representatives or Occupational Health.
- Managers should conduct a Stress Risk Assessment using Appendix B, when there is sufficient evidence that individuals within their area of responsibility are demonstrating signs of work-related stress or when changes to the team, working environment or workloads have occurred.
- If a whole departmental assessment is to be carried out by the manager, provide each member, or a representative number of colleagues including a Trade Union Safety Representative where available, with a copy of the HSE Management Standards Indicator Tool questionnaire. These can be completed anonymously. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/assets/docs/indicatortool.pdf>
- Individual employees should complete the HSE Management Standards Indicator Tool questionnaire at the earliest opportunity when they recognise they are suffering from work-related stress. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/assets/docs/indicatortool.pdf> and discuss their findings with their line manager at the soonest opportunity when an individual Stress Risk Assessment is being completed.

Appendix A

HSE Stress Management Standards

The Trust will follow the standards of good management in tackling occupational stress, where management should be able to demonstrate the points below, in line with the Health & Safety Executive's Stress Management Standards.

Standard 1: Demands (includes issues such as work load, work patterns and the work environment)

- Employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of the job.
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.
- What should be happening / aims to be achieved:
- The Trust provides employees with adequate and achievable demands in relation to the agreed hours of work.
- People's skills and abilities are matched to the job demands.
- Jobs are designed to be within the capabilities of employees.
- Employees' concerns about their work environment are addressed.

Standard 2: Control (How much say the person has in the way they do their work)

The standard states that:

- Employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.
- What should be happening / aims to be achieved: where possible, employees have control over their pace of work
- Employees are encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work
- Where possible, employees are encouraged to develop new skills to help them undertake new and challenging pieces of work
- The Trust encourages employees to develop their skills.
- Employees have a say over when breaks can be taken
- Employees are consulted over their work patterns

Standard 3: Support (includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the Trust, line management and colleagues)

The standard states that:

- Employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors.
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns. What should be happening / aims to be achieved:
- The Trust has policies and procedures to adequately support employees
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to support their colleagues
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to support their colleagues
- Employees know what support is available and how and when to access it
- Employees know how to access the required resources to do their job
- Employees receive regular and constructive feedback

Standard 4: Relationships (includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour)

The standard states that:

- Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g. bullying at work.
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.
- The Trust promotes positive behaviours at work to avoid conflict and ensure fairness.
- Employees share information relevant to their work.
- The Trust has agreed policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour.
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to deal with unacceptable behaviour
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to report unacceptable behaviour.

Standard 5: Role (Whether people understand their role within the Trust and whether the Trust ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles)

The standard states that:

- Employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities.
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.
- The Trust ensures that, as far as possible, the differing requirements it places upon employees are compatible.
- The Trust provides information to enable employees to understand their role and responsibilities
- The Trust ensures that, as far as possible, the requirements it places upon employees are clear
- Systems are in place to enable employees to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their roles and responsibilities

Standard 6: Change (How organisational change is managed and communicated)

The standard states that:

- Employees indicate that the Trust engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change.
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.
- What should be happening / aims to be achieved:
- The Trust provides employees with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes.
- The Trust ensures adequate employee consultation on changes and provides opportunities for employees to influence proposals.
- Employees are aware of the probable impact of any changes to their jobs. If necessary, employees are given training to support any changes in their jobs
- Employees are aware of timetables for changes;
- Employees have access to relevant support during changes.

Appendix B

INDIVIDUAL WORKPLACE STRESS RISK ASSESSMENT FORM

Job/Department assessed:	Colleague covered by assessment:	Responsible Manager:
Assessor:	Date of Assessment:	Signature:

Potential Hazards i.e. Workplace Stressors:	Existing Controls: (i.e. how are the hazards being managed)	Current Risk Rating: (Use the Risk Scoring Matrix to evaluate the level of risk)	What more can be done?	Target Date for implementation:	By Whom:
Demands (for example overwork and under work)					
Control (for example lack of control over accountability for work activities)					
Role (for example colleagues feeling that the job requires them to behave in conflicting ways, confusion about structures and job roles)					

<i>EXAMPLE: Colleagues may be at risk if they do not have planned goals and objectives for their job</i>	<i>The Trust has in place an appraisal process which allows managers and colleagues to clearly define their roles and responsibilities and training needs.</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Ensure that all colleagues receive an annual appraisal.</i>	<i>Within 12 months</i>	<i>Local managers</i>
Potential Hazards i.e. Workplace Stressors:	Existing Controls: (i.e. how are the hazards being managed)	Current Risk Rating: (Use the Risk Scoring Matrix to evaluate the level of risk)	What more can be done?	Target Date for implementation action:	By Whom:
Change (for example uncertainty about what is happening, fears about job security)					
Relationships (for example with Line Managers and colleagues)					
Support (for example lack of support, not being able to balance the demands of work and life outside of work)					

Other (examples of other stressors may include working environment, business travel etc)					

STRESS - RISK SCORING MATRIX APPENDIX B (CONTINUED)						
		Probability				
		Rare (less than 20%)	Unlikely (20 – 40%)	Possible (40-60%)	Likely (60-80%)	Almost certain +80%
Consequence	Insignificant	1	2	3	4	5
	Minor	2	4	6	8	10
	Moderate	3	6	9	12	15
	Major	4	8	12	16	20
	Catastrophic	5	10	15	20	25

ACTION AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Score	Risk	Action	Reporting Requirements
1-6	Risk is within tolerance	<p>Within risk appetite / tolerance</p> <p>Managed through normal control measures at the level it was identified</p>	<p>Within tolerance so no reporting</p> <p>Record on risk register at the level the risk was identified</p>
8-10		<p>Within risk appetite / tolerance</p> <p>Review control measures at the level it was identified</p>	<p>Within tolerance so no reporting</p> <p>Record on risk register at the level the risk was identified</p>
12-15	Risk Exceeds tolerance	<p>Exceeds risk appetite / tolerance</p> <p>Actions to be developed, implemented and monitored at the level the risk was identified</p>	<p>Record on Risk Register at the level the risk was identified</p> <p>Report to next level of management</p>
16-20		<p>Exceeds risk appetite / tolerance</p> <p>Immediate action required</p> <p>Treatment plans to be developed, implemented and monitored at the level the risk was identified</p>	<p>Record on Risk Register at the level the risk was identified</p> <p>Report to next level of management With Executive Director approval - enter onto Corporate Risk Register</p>

Appendix C

Action to be taken if an employee reports they are stressed whilst at work

Once aware of an individual feeling stressed at work a manager should promptly discuss this with the individual by holding a **Wellbeing Conversation** (within two weeks of the initial concern raised) and complete a **Stress Risk Assessment Form (Appendix B)**. An **Action Log Form (Appendix D)** should also be initiated to enable on-going review of agreed actions. As a result of this conversation, additional management action may need to be taken, depending on the severity of the case and the reason for the stress. A note should be kept in the personal file of all the discussions and contacts.

Note: Sometimes, individuals might say that they 'feel stressed' when actually all they really mean is that they have had a particularly difficult day. It isn't necessary to make a note of every 'one-off' event that is reported. However, managers should monitor these situations and complete the correct documentation at a later date if the problem remains unresolved or the situation warrants it.

If an employee reports that the stress has arisen directly as a result of their work, then the manager should try to identify the root cause of the problem with them. The aim is to identify possible actions that could be taken to help the individual deal with the problem and resolve the situation. It may be appropriate for HR and/or OH to be involved at this stage.

The manager should check with the individual at 4, 8 and 12 week intervals (using the Action Log in Appendix D) following the initial assessment to ensure that no further issues have arisen and identify whether any further action is required. Advice from Occupational Health should be sought as soon as possible to gain access to appropriate support from outside agencies, or via the Trust's free counselling service.

If the cause of the stress involves an employee's relationship with their manager, another manager or a more senior manager should meet with them. If the stress has arisen as a result of the employee's home circumstances but it is affecting or being made worse by their work, then the concern should still be discussed using the form in Appendix D and kept on file. This must include identifying any actions that can be taken to alleviate the impact that work is having on the individual's stress in order to help them with their personal situation, (for example a temporary reduction of hours, a period of annual leave etc.).

When a manager receives personal information it is important that the individual's right to privacy is respected, therefore, it is not appropriate to include details of the nature of the personal problem on the Form, unless consent is given. Agreement from the individual will also be needed if the manager needs to discuss the personal problem with another party.

What to do if a person reports sick with stress

When an individual is off sick with work related stress it is important that they are signposted to support either from the Counselling service, Occupational Health or external agencies such as Cruse Bereavement Support. There is research that shows that when individuals are off sick for more than 4 weeks it becomes more difficult for them to engage, and to return to work. Depending on the individual and the circumstances, an early referral to occupational health is encouraged and the individual should be provided with information regarding support offered to colleagues.

Action to be taken if an employee reports they are stressed whilst absent.

If an employee is absent as a result of stress it is important to establish and maintain contact and support as appropriate. If an employee has reported the stress as being directly as a result of their work, steps must be taken to understand why this is the case. If the individual

contacts their manager then the manager should try to determine the root cause and discuss some solutions/support keeping a record of these discussions.

When an individual goes off sick with stress/anxiety a management referral should be made to Occupational Health to ensure that support is offered at the earliest opportunity.

A letter should also be sent by the manager to any employee who has submitted a GP's certificate and has been absent for a period of 2 weeks if they have not personally contacted their manager in that time to discuss their reasons for absence. The reason for this is because there is research that shows that the longer a person is off with stress the more difficult it is to return or resolve. (Please note that this is independent of the employee having phoned their manager to report their sickness absence as per Trust policy). It may be necessary for an alternative manager to make contact with the employee if the reason for the work related stress is due to the relationship with their line manager. A template letter is available within the Managers Toolkit section on the Human Resources Intranet page.

If this does not prompt a response from the employee, a further letter should be sent at an appropriate time taking advice from Human Resources colleagues. A template letter is available within the Managers Toolkit section on the Human Resources Intranet page.

If the individual remains off sick with stress/anxiety, this may become a long term absence (after 4 weeks) and the manager should refer to the Staff Health, Wellbeing and Sickness Absence Policy for further guidance or contact your HR Advisor. Occupational Health advice should continue to be sought as appropriate.

The process of contacting and communicating with the individual may also include the consideration of a request for a home visit if they have been absent for a period of 2 weeks or longer, and are unable to come in to their work location. Meetings can also take place in a mutually agreed private offsite location or virtually.

A record of the dates that the letters are sent, confirmation that contact has been made and the details of any agreed outcomes must be kept on the individual's personal file.

What to do if the person requests no contact

Sometimes employees do not want to be contacted. Do not accept this at face value and sever all contact with the individual, as evidence shows clearly that this hinders recovery and greatly reduces the chances of a successful return to work. People may request no contact because they feel anxious, embarrassed or ashamed about the way they are feeling. A sympathetic manner, being sensitive and treating the person normally can help to overcome this.

Sometimes, a request for no contact can arise because the manager is perceived to have been a factor in the employee becoming unwell. In such circumstances, options could include offering another colleague to make contact or someone from occupational health. If there are work issues (real or perceived) it is essential that these are addressed or it will be unlikely that the person will return to work.

If you have made all reasonable efforts to communicate with an individual and they refuse to remain in contact with you then you cannot be expected to anticipate what reasonable adjustments might help them to return to work.

What to do when an employee returns to work after stress related absence

Once notification is received of a proposed date for return to work, a Return to Work meeting should be organised by the manager with the employee. An HR Advisor together with the employee's Trade Union Representative, may also be present in accordance with the Trust's Staff Health, Wellbeing and Sickness Absence Policy to discuss and agree what

adjustments may be necessary to support a sustainable return to work (and ultimately, if successful, a resumption to full duties at a time that is considered appropriate).

Advice should already have been sought from Occupational Health to assist you in doing this, but a return to work plan may include one or more of the following: reduced hours; re-structured workload; temporary adjustment of supervisory /management responsibilities; additional training or support, phased return etc. The individual's progress on their return must be regularly monitored, reviewed and managed as required and this should be documented as above.

When an employee returns from sick leave with stress the most important thing is for the manager and the team to make them feel welcomed back. Remember to make sure that the person does not return to an impossible workload or an inferior workspace. Take account where possible of any reasonable adjustments that have been recommended by the Occupational Health Department. Set achievable goals that make the person feel that they are making progress, and be aware that some people may offer to take on too much to prove themselves. Take the time to have frequent informal chats to provide an opportunity to say if they feel there are any problems. However, ensure that you do not make the person feel that they are being over monitored or scrutinised.

Examples of Reasonable Adjustments

Occupational Health will be best placed to make recommendations on adjustments that you could make to the workload, work pattern, or work design that may help to support the individual's return to work. Managers should consider whether these short term adjustments are possible to implement, and discuss alternatives with Occupational Health. Examples of reasonable adjustments might include:

- A phased return to work – possibly on reduced hours building up (usually over a 4 week period)
- Looking at aspects of the job that the person finds particularly stressful and temporarily reassigning them or sharing them
- Adjusting the content of the job temporarily
- Allowing the employee greater control over how they plan and manage their time or workload
- Discussing time off for attending therapeutic sessions, treatment, assessment and/or rehabilitation (See Leave & Pay Policy).
- Changing shift patterns, or exploring different flexible working options such as part-time, job, share, annualised hours
- Altering start and finish times to avoid rush hour or to enable them to plan medication regimes etc.
- Look at what adjustments could be made to the physical environment if noisy etc.
- Offer a quiet place where they can go for time out if feeling anxious or stressed
- Sign post to the Family Support Adviser if this is an area of stress
- Providing support to develop skills if identified as a training need
- Signposting to outside organisations
- Signposting to support using the Health & Wellbeing Pinwheel on the Trust Intranet.
- Transferring temporarily, or permanently to another role within the Trust, another site or another department where returning to their old job is a barrier to getting them back, or keeping them at work.

Appendix D

Stress at Work – Workplace and Individual Risk Assessment Action Log.

Individual Stress Risk Assessment to be completed within 2 weeks of risk being identified.	
Date completed:	
Actions:	
Manager's signature:	
Employee's signature:	
1st review – 4 weeks after individual Stress Risk Assessment	
Date completed:	
Actions:	
Manager's signature:	
Employee's signature:	
2nd review – 8 weeks after individual Stress Risk Assessment	
Date completed:	
Actions:	
Manager's signature:	
Employee's signature:	
3rd review – 12 weeks after individual risk assessment	
Date completed:	
Actions:	
Manager's signature:	
Employee's signature:	

Appendix E

Frequently Asked Questions

What do I do if someone is experiencing symptoms of stress as a result of a performance or conduct issue?

Always maintain appropriate contact with the employee concerned. In the case of performance management, discuss and agree what help/support they may need to reduce their stress levels. Make sure that any agreements that are made are actioned, and that you regularly review their progress against targets on the Action Plan. If their performance does not improve despite your intervention, check that there are no underlying health reasons that may be contributing to poor performance (you may need to seek advice from Occupational Health).

If an employee is facing disciplinary action and then reports sick due to stress, it is important to treat them in accordance with the normal sickness procedures, maintain contact, and advise them that the action will remain pending until their return. If their absence continues, contact your HR Advisor who will advise further. This might involve obtaining Occupational Health advice regarding the employee's fitness for work/to attend meetings, the expected length of time for recovery and whether a speedier conclusion to the disciplinary issue might improve his/her health. It is not true that in all cases the disciplinary process has to be suspended whilst the employee is absent due to stress (refer to the Disciplinary Policy). Advice must be obtained from Occupational Health and the employee must be informed of the need for the referral.

What do I do if the stress is related to a home issue?

Even if stress arises solely from a home or non-work issue it is still likely to impact an employee's work. Hold a **Wellbeing Conversation** with the employee, show your concern for their situation and signpost the individual to Health and Wellbeing support available within and outside of the Trust.

What if the individual won't talk to their manager because they feel they are the cause of the stress?

If the cause of stress involves an employee's relationship with their own manager, another manager or a more senior manager should initially hold a **Wellbeing Conversation** with them to determine the way forward.

When should I refer to Occupational Health?

If an employee is off work with stress and there is no indication that they expect to return to work in the near future then you should refer them to Occupational Health. Free counselling is available for colleagues for both work and non-work related issues with a view to maintaining them at work or helping them to return.